

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW UP VISIT**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To present the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge, of their follow up visit in June 2019.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are:
- The peer team's headline message for the Council is "Well done North Lincolnshire!".
  - The peer team first visited in January 2018 and again in June 2019 to help the Council take stock of progress made.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge is a well-established sector led improvement tool that the LGA offer to all Local Authorities.
- 2.2 The LGA Peer Team first visited North Lincolnshire in January 2018. As part of the process the same team returned to North Lincolnshire on 27-28 June 2019. The purpose of the follow up visit was to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress made against the areas of improvement and development identified in January 2018.
- 2.3 The peer team's headline message for the Council was "**Well done North Lincolnshire!**". The report confirms that 'impressive progress' has been made in implementing the vision for the future shape of the organisation. The team reported that they had seen a 'huge visible difference in the Council'.
- 2.4 The full report from the follow up visit is attached, the key headline messages include:
- The Council has kept and improved needs-led services performing at a high level during a period of intense change
  - Leadership has been distributed across the organisation to great effect and has really nailed collaboration, both internally and externally
  - Managers and staff have a strong sense of purpose and are empowered and trusted and this is enabling further redesign of services to deliver the best outcomes for your communities

- 2.5 The report concludes with a single recommendation that ‘the Council should continue to profile and share its incredible story with the wider local government sector’.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1. It is recommended that Cabinet receive the LGA Peer Challenge Follow-up Visit Report and agree to its publication on the Council’s website.

### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Not applicable

### **5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

- 5.1 There are no specific resource implications associated with this report.

### **6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.) OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

- 6.1 Not applicable.

### **7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

- 7.1 Not applicable

### **8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

- 8.1 The LGA Peer Challenge process involved a wide range of stakeholders. The outcomes of this engagement is included in the LGA report.

- 8.2 There are no conflicts of interest associated with this report.

### **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet receive the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge follow up report and note the positive change observed by the LGA Team.

- 9.2 The Cabinet may wish to consider extending its thanks to the LGA Peer Team for the time taken to undertake the follow up visit and report.

## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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Date: 29 August 2019

### **Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

**LGA CPC Report January 2018**  
**LGA CPC Follow Up Visit Report June 2019**

Corporate Peer Challenge: Follow Up Visit

## **North Lincolnshire Council**

27 - 28 June 2019

Feedback Report

## 1. Introduction and purpose

North Lincolnshire Council received an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge during 23 – 26 January 2018.

Feedback from the Peer Challenge concluded that:

*“The Council is a well performing organisation with highly visible and engaging leadership at both political and managerial level. It has a track record of delivering good quality local services. There is strong shared ambition between Members and senior officers to make North Lincolnshire a great place to live, and they have a clear vision to enable this to happen. This is backed up with enthusiasm and team working between Cabinet Members and the senior leadership team. This strong shared ambition and vision is also evident among Council staff and its strategic partners - everyone is focused on making a real difference to people’s lives.*

*The Council is going through a complex transformation, organisational development and change process which could be difficult for those outside of the detailed planning processes ongoing within the Council to understand. Members and officers need to continue to find ways to simplify the narrative and make sure that it resonates with the wider stakeholders, particularly frontline staff, partners, local communities and service users.”*

The purpose of the follow up visit on 27 - 28 June 2019 was to help the Council take stock of progress made against the areas of improvement identified in January 2018.

This report provides a written summary of the key observations made by the peer team during their follow up visit to North Lincolnshire Council, addresses the key issues of the recommendations made in January 2018 and acknowledges where the Council is at this moment in time.

### Peer review and challenge

Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils’ needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council’s own performance and improvement focus. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. The process is not designed to provide a technical assessment or due diligence on specific proposals. Neither is it intended to provide prescriptive recommendations. The peer challenge process provides feedback, observations and insights from experienced practitioners that will help validate, reality check and further develop the Council’s current plans, proposals and evolving thinking about the future.

### Scope and focus

The peer team were asked to consider the progress made since January 2018 and provide observations on how it is doing. In doing so the peer team considered the areas for improvement identified by the original peer challenge and the key recommendations made at that time (Appendix 1).

## Peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the Council's requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the Council. The peers who undertook the follow up visit to North Lincolnshire Council were:

- **Cheryl Coppell OBE** (Former Chief Executive, London Borough of Havering)
- **Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE** (Leader, London Borough of Bexley)
- **Joanna Ruffle** (Director of Transformation, Southend-on-Sea Council)
- **Andy Vaughan** (Corporate Director for Commercial and Operations, Nottingham City Council)
- **Satvinder Rana** (Programme Manager, LGA)

The full team had been involved in the original peer challenge in January 2018. The peer team spent two days onsite at North Lincolnshire Council on 27-28 June 2019 during which they spoke to more than 90 stakeholders including senior managers, councillors and budget holders; gathered information and views from more than 23 meetings, visits to key sites and additional research and reading; and collectively spent more than 112 hours to determine its findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly 3 weeks in North Lincolnshire Council.

The peer team's key findings and observation from the follow up visit on 27-28 June 2019 are outlined below.

## 2. Key findings and observations

The peer team's headline message for the Council is "Well done North Lincolnshire!". The Council has made very impressive progress in implementing its vision for the future shape of the organisation and the peer team would like to congratulate everyone who has contributed to North Lincolnshire's transformation journey. There is a huge visible difference in the Council, and this is being felt among its strategic partners and service users.

Over the last 18 months the Council has implemented stage one of a substantial transformation programme that centred on establishing clear direction for the organisation, implementing the organisational model, reshaping its senior leadership team, introducing a new programme of organisational development, and investing in new technologies and workspaces to become more agile and efficient in how it does business and provides services to its residents. It has achieved this whilst keeping and improving its strong needs-led services performing at high level during this period of intense change.

The vision and ambition shared by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive has been pivotal in demonstrating what the Council was trying to achieve. By working together, they were able to secure political and managerial support and steer people through this period of major change. As a result, leaders at all levels have driven the

cultural transformation across the organisation at the same time as building and fostering alliances with partners to deliver better outcomes for the people of North Lincolnshire. This work cannot be underestimated, and the Council has successfully achieved organisational and cultural change across the organisation which is very visible.

The peer team heard very positive messages from staff around the process of change and what it led to. They felt trusted and empowered as they went along the journey and now own the new culture and ways of working. It is evident to see that leadership has been distributed across the organisation to great effect and has really nailed collaboration, both internally and externally. Members, staff and other stakeholders speak very highly of the Council and about what it has achieved as well as the ambition it has for the future. Managers and staff have a strong sense of purpose and are empowered and trusted, and this is facilitating further redesign of services to enable the best outcomes for local communities.

### Culture and transformation

The place feels vibrant and confident and there is renewed pride and energy among staff. The Council has successfully used the physical office relocation as a cultural change tool, and this has been a pivotal moment to demonstrate change across the organisation. The peer team saw evidence where the Council has:

- Raised aspirations
- Enabled new ways of working through technology
- Raised staff confidence
- Delivered regeneration in the Town Centre
- Facilitated the creation of a new University Campus incorporating the Institute of Technology
- Embedded trust in staff and new ways of working
- Facilitated and embedded collaborative working
- Saved money

The transformation was led from the front by the senior leadership team, and they took people with them. People commented that they felt they owned the changes and were able to ask questions, challenge and make suggestions on how things might work better. The senior leadership team were able to model the new ways of working and this gave confidence to staff to invest their energies into the changes that were occurring.

Members and senior managers made some brave decisions to implement fundamental change on all fronts across the whole organisation, and they held their nerve to make this happen. It is evident that there has been both financial and emotional investment in culture change as a key driver for transformation and improving outcomes. So, things that were being talked about 18 months ago are now a reality and people were able to demonstrate through practical examples on how the changes have enabled them to translate more agile ways of working to the frontline in their interactions with service users.

Culture change is well-led and highly engaging through 'high-support, high-challenge' practice. The peer team heard from staff how they were encouraged to find solutions to some of the challenges of the transformation journey and 'road-testing' new technologies and new ways of working – "It's not been done to people". The results of this well-led, inclusive and supportive approach are not only reflected in some of the external facing outcomes, but also in staff metrics, for example reduced sickness level and short-term absences, reduced staff turn-over, reduction in use of agency workers, improved engagement with and among staff. This culture change that was so important to the Council 18 months ago now underpins everything the Council has achieved during this period and it is heartening and encouraging to see people celebrating and sharing their achievement with the wider local government sector. Staff morale is high and there is a different buzz about the place – "silo walls have gone and there's a fresh modern feel".

The key challenge for the Council going forward will be to sustain this very positive progress as it uses the transformation of the Council to further drive transformation of place.

### Transition to outcomes-based ways of working

The peer team was particularly struck by the great use of data and insights in the redesign of the Council with partners and communities. The Council has used data and insights to find different solutions to different challenges the local community faces. For example:

- Detailed data-mapping down to postcode level with partners to target interventions (e.g. by the Police and Fire and Rescue Service, which included fire fighters teaching children how to read in their communities).
- Sharing data with Parish Councils to enable them to understand local communities and their needs for services at the local level. This, coupled with giving them opportunities to take over small budgets, has resulted in Parish Councils taking over more responsibilities, for example, grass cutting.
- Development of the Hubs using the information and insights on local communities.
- Redesign of the way bulky waste items are collected to enable collections to be scheduled.
- To prioritise and know what is important.
- To support policy development and performance improvement.
- Data-led analysis to ensure efficiency and assurance in highways management.

The peer team also heard of many examples of how good practice relating to use of population needs analysis and decision making at the lowest level is contributing to saving money and improving outcomes:

- Demand management (managing need) at strategic level where the strategy is based around a whole team approach and thinking, ensuring everyone in the system understand the implications of their decisions e.g. identifying cohorts of children and schools where there might be a need for interventions; ensuring everyone in the system understand the consequences of their decisions, for

example SEND transport where data and insights are used to plan the right solution.

- Shaping the changing market in care services to ensure supply, quality and equity through the sharing of information and insights about local economies and supply markets.
- Clarity and transparency about threshold in children and adult services, supported by early help to manage demand, for example, maximising the Disabled Facilities Grant through early help with aids to enable independent living; Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach for people with housing support needs.
- Empowering leisure centre managers to make local decisions to provide more integrated services in leisure centres.

Many councils collect data, but there is ample evidence to demonstrate that North Lincolnshire Council interrogate and use it to empower, engage and improve services.

### Governance and accountability

During the original peer challenge the peer team recommended that the Council continue to pay attention to financial controls and risk management going into the transformation period. The peer team is assured that adequate safe-guards are in place and the place-based outcomes approach to budgeting is enabling innovative solutions and is counter-balanced by strong assurance both in budgeting and performance monitoring. Risks are well understood, owned and managed and there is collective responsibility and accountability for decisions, money, and performance. This responsibility and accountability exist not just internally within the Council but also externally among partners such as maintained schools and academies.

Governance is wider than just the Council in North Lincolnshire. The Council has created partnership governance structures, which are now well embedded, for example: shared accountability for holding education and social care providers to account. It is evident that there is trust and accountability in North Lincolnshire, which is “more than just scrutiny”.

### Place leadership

As well as delivering an impressive operational and cultural transformation across the organisation, the Council has also delivered a number of strategic regeneration and place shaping projects. Political leadership deserves credit for the sense of belief in the place and the Council to enable all the improvements that have been made.

Collaborative working between the political and managerial leadership has enabled the Council to get out there and establish a much “bolder voice” across the sub-region. North Lincolnshire is a key player within sub-regional partnerships and uses its meaningful presence on strategic forums such as Rail North and TFN Boards and the Humber and Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure the best outcomes for North Lincolnshire. This “bolder voice” gives the Council confidence and resilience to better respond to challenges. There are also now better developed plans such as the economic growth plan and an emerging single place plan to provide a much clearer, ambitious and shared narrative with stakeholders.

There is a strong place-based team commitment among Members and officers, which has an aspirational and inspiring agenda for North Lincolnshire and has been leading the way in the physical transformation of the area – “our people and our place is what we are here for”. This teamwork has led to a relentless focus on priorities such as Town Centre regeneration, University Campus, Market relocation and wider economic growth. The Council is effectively using its assets and influence as leverage to facilitate regeneration and investment and this is likely to see further regeneration of the Town Centre, delivery of the economic growth plan, and service redesign.

There is also now sectorial approach to economic activity which has been articulated in the Economic Growth Plan 2019 and this is facilitating the building of strong partnerships with local businesses and other strategic stakeholders. For example, there is a strong partnership delivering affordable housing. There has been a maturation in working relationships with the NHS, with positive progress being made towards health and social care integration, and partnerships with other Lincolnshire and Humber councils are demonstrating a growing sense of stronger collaborative working.

### **Recommendations**

North Lincolnshire Council has an incredible story to tell about its transformation journey, its use of data and insight to transform and create excellent services, and its innovative work on demand management; the Council should continue to profile and share this with the wider local government sector.

### **3. Next steps**

The peer team appreciate the Council will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with the senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer review/challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The Local Government Association (LGA) is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and the LGA would be happy to discuss this. Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Tel: 07747 636 910 and Email: [mark.edgell@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.edgell@local.gov.uk)

In the meantime, the peer team is keen to continue the relationship they have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. It will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues they have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.



**Satvinder Rana**  
Programme Manager

(On behalf of the peer challenge team)

**Key recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (23 – 26 January 2018).**

1. **Ensure the Council vision and its internal and external plans are written in clear plain** language that is understandable by the local community and stakeholders. Test this with relevant focus groups before publication.
2. The Council has been "good" for many years and this should continue to be celebrated while using it as a base to aim for excellence across the board. **There is a need to continue to change to remain sustainable and to meet local needs and ambitions effectively. Ensure such necessary change is not interpreted as a negation of everything that went before** as this may alienate some staff groups who have worked for the council for a long time.
3. **Continue to pay attention to robust performance management and financial controls throughout the transformation and manage the risks.** This will ensure that the 'golden thread' is visible and that the Council can keep track of progress, demonstrate what it is achieving and how it is managing risks.
4. **Be alive to and embrace different perspectives.** This will enable to the Council to benefit from a broader field of creative problem solving and finding solutions to the challenges of serving a geographically diverse community.
5. **Continue to manage the risks inherent both in local government and in the major change programme in hand.**
6. **You are a 'good' Council so 'tell your story'.** There is a lot to celebrate in North Lincolnshire and a lot that can be helpful to learning across the local government sector – this should be shared locally, regionally and nationally through a well-developed and simplified narrative.
7. **Accelerate and cement enhanced partnership working:** Develop upon the sound basis evidenced of expanding and increasingly influential partnership working with communities, business and public sector organisations.